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ABSTRACT

This West Virginia community resource guide discusses the growing crisis of school dropouts, reviews some of the consequences of dropping out of school, and provides guidance for schools and communities who seek to initiate a dropout prevention program. After an introductory overview of the dropout problem; the human, health, and educational effects of dropouts on West Virginia; the demography of dropouts in West Virginia, and the individual and family risk factors for school dropouts, the guide discusses the steps to take in initiating a dropout prevention program. The first step is to gather specific information about the school system and community climate; accordingly, advice is provided in a question-and-answer format. The next steps discussed include building a community coalition and developing a community planning process. Strategies for prevention and intervention are then discussed, including tutoring/peer tutoring, extracurricular involvement, parent education, alternative schools, counseling, mentoring, and preschool programs. The next section addresses strategies for developing financial resources to support a dropout prevention program, including school system resources, foundations and corporations, and other local resources. The guide concludes with a discussion of the role of community advocates in initiating such a program, along with a summary and brief suggestions to assist businesses, parents, teachers, and the community in helping children stay in school. Appended are illustrative materials for duplication or for use as overhead transparencies. (TE)

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A Community Resource Guide for School Dropout Prevention

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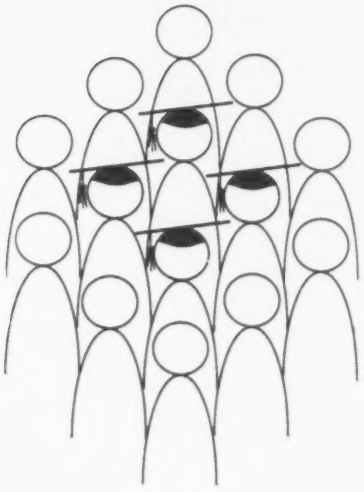

A Community Resource Guide for School Dropout Prevention

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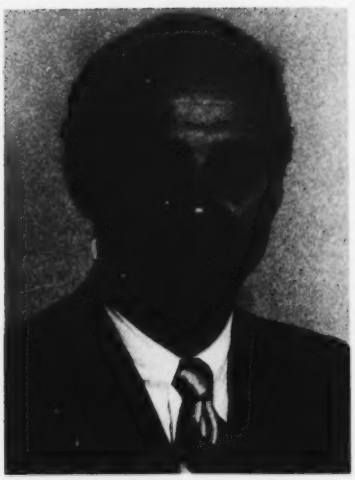
Why should every young West Virginian stay in school? The answer should be obvious. Your future is largely determined by your success in the classroom. That's not just me talking. West Virginia ranks 46th of the 50 states in youth poverty. That's reflecting the very low high school graduation rate we achieved through the 1980s. However, our high school graduation rate has improved by 17%, more than 8 times as fast as the national average. Why? Again, the answer should be obvious. Time invested in school will pay you big profits for the rest of your life, and West Virginia youngsters are finding that out.

Gaston Caperton
Governor

I applaud the interest that West Virginia's community leaders are demonstrating in the area of school dropout prevention, and the actions they are taking to reduce the magnitude of this problem in our state. In today's society, the ability to understand and solve complex problems is essential to responsible citizenship. We in higher education share with the primary and secondary schools, local communities, and state leaders the obligation to prepare students for full participation in society. Working together, we must encourage students to achieve their individual potential and to keep the doors of further educational opportunity open by staying in school.

Neil S. Bucklew
President, West Virginia University



We are committed to making the changes needed in West Virginia to keep our young people in school. It won't be easy, and no one group can do it alone. It will take the combined efforts of everyone – the governor, the legislature, business and labor, parents, schools, higher education, and local communities – to combat this problem. It is time to pull together and help all the young people of West Virginia begin to reach their potential.

Henry R. Marockie
State Superintendent of Schools

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The Dropout Problem

Dropping out of high school is not just a West Virginia problem—it is a national problem. Students who leave the mainstream represent a significant loss to themselves and to society. Alienated students will never achieve their full potential since their abilities will remain underdeveloped.

Receiving a high school education is more important to the United States than ever. America's future growth and prosperity is linked to educational achievements. Yet, a crisis of enormous proportion threatens the future of today's youth. The crisis is high school dropouts. The crisis of the high school dropout is largely unrecognized by the public. Many feel dropouts are "inevitable," some think the problem was solved in the '60s and '70s and others suggest little can be done without completely restructuring present economic and social systems.

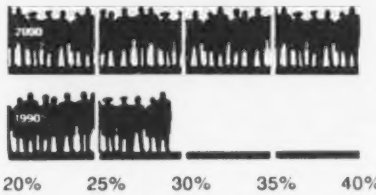
The United States has traditionally afforded many opportunities for employment of unskilled labor. The shift toward modernization and the movement of high-tech industry has eliminated many of these jobs. Today's high school dropout will face increasingly prolonged periods of unemployment.

The consequences of leaving school before acquiring a diploma are grave. Seven major differences separate a dropout and a high school graduate:

1. Dropouts are more frequently unemployed.
2. The lifetime income for male dropouts is approximately 30 percent less than that of male high school graduates who do not go to college.
3. Dropouts are six to ten times more likely to be involved in crime.
4. Eighty-five percent of state prison inmates are school dropouts.
5. Dropouts pay less tax monies and are more often on welfare.
6. Dropouts have fewer employment opportunities and fewer advancements.
7. Dropouts experience less sense of worth and personal satisfaction.

Educators agree that the problem is exceedingly complex. Without a high school diploma, the chances of economic security and satisfaction are dramatically decreased, and the likelihood of turning toward crime and despair is increased. The implications are self-evident.

National Projected Dropout Rate by Year 2000



If current rate persists, the proportion of children "at risk" for school failure will grow each year.

The Situation

Each year an estimated 3.6 million children begin their formal schooling in the United States.

* One out of four will be from families who live in poverty.
* Fourteen percent will be the children of teenage mothers.
* Fifteen percent will be physically or mentally handicapped.
* As many as 15 percent will be immigrants who speak a language other than English.
* Fourteen percent will be children of unmarried mothers.
* Forty percent will live in broken homes before they reach 18.
* Ten percent will have poorly educated, even illiterate parents.
* Between 25 percent and 33 percent will be latchkey children with no one to greet them when they come home from school.
* And, 25 percent or more will not finish school. If current trends persist, the proportion of children "at risk" for school failure will grow each year.

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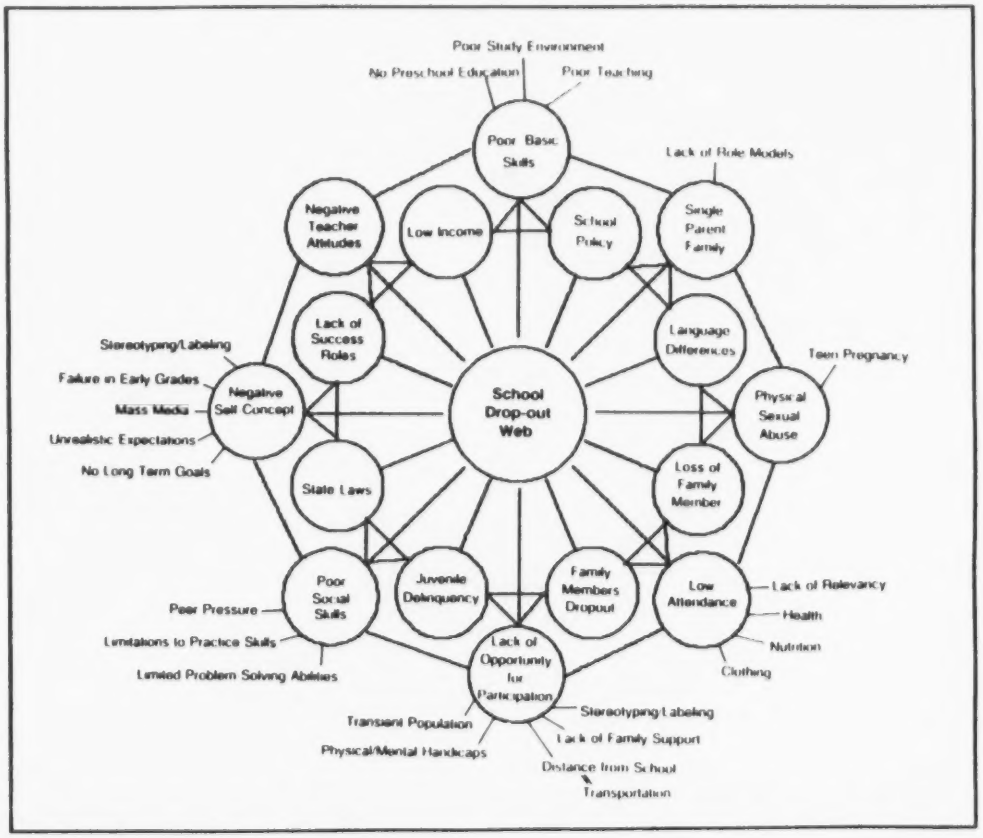
Effects of Dropouts on West Virginia

The average annual earnings of a West Virginia high school graduate is estimated at $10,176. The 4,000 students in West Virginia who quit school each year and do not find employment risk the loss of over $40 million in taxable income. This is a $40 million loss for the state in just *one year*. Instead of contributing to the state's economy dropouts deplete resources by their dependency upon welfare, unemployment, charity health care and other indigent services.

Human: If one believes that education enhances the quality of life, the dropout rate in West Virginia is a human tragedy. Clearly, the dropout rate reflects the lower aspirations and expectations of West Virginia's young people. The lack of a basic education contributes to misery, disappointment and bitterness.

Health: Recent studies reported in the New England Journal of Medicine reveal that high school dropouts are significantly more likely to suffer from high blood pressure and heart attacks. This is due, in large part, to the high levels of stress in their lives. These health risks result in higher rates of absenteeism from work. Even the simplest task may be threatening to a person who can't read and write. A trip to the grocery store becomes a challenge, completing an employment application is torment, and getting a driver's license becomes a harsh reality of modern life.

Education: Dropouts generally make less money and thus pay less taxes that go to support education. The result is that educational institutions have less resources for preventive efforts and less resources to fund traditional school goals.



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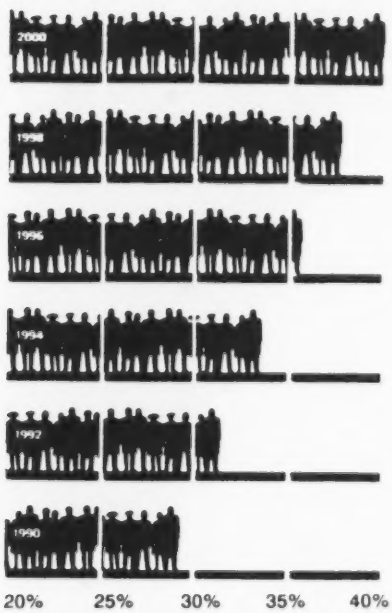
Who Drops Out

Characteristics of West Virginia dropouts in 1989.

- Half of dropouts were male; half were female.
- Poor teenagers were four times more likely than non-poor teens to have below-average basic academic skills; poor teens were three times more likely to dropout than non-poor teens.
- 53.6% of dropouts ranked above the bottom quartile of their class in scholastic ability.
- 93% of dropouts seldom or never participated in extra-curricular activities.
- 75% of dropouts reported no educational plans for their future; over 27% of dropouts cited no job prospects nor any plans to look for a job.

National Projected Dropout Rate by Year 2000



If current rate persists, the proportion of children "at risk" for school failure will grow each year.

Why Do Students Leave School?

The three main reasons students give for dropping out are poor grades, family problems and money problems. In 1989 one-half of West Virginia's dropouts cited lack of interest or motivation and dislike of school experiences as reasons for dropping out.

Some students have family problems that are so severe that most of their energy is spent on basic survival and little is left for learning. Pregnancy and parenting are common reasons for girls who drop out. However, research studies indicate that many girls who have unplanned pregnancies would remain in or return to school if child care and alternative schooling were available.

Other students drop out of school to work—sometimes a necessity for a family's survival. Nationally, children begin work at age 14 and nearly half of 17-year-olds are working. However, most working students spend their money on cars and personal items and are not saving for college.

A common myth is that dropouts are not intelligent or motivated. Unlike the stereotype, dropouts are intellectually capable of completing high school. However, what is not known is the evolution of attitudes and problems that lead students to school dissatisfaction. Research has examined aspects of schooling that harm girls' and minorities' self-esteem and independence. Any student with low self-esteem is at-risk for poor school achievement and dropping out.

SCHOOL PAYS

Degree	Average Monthly Earnings
Professional	$ 3,439
Doctorate	2,747
Master's	1,956
Bachelor's	1,540
Associate	1,188
Vocational	990
High School	848
No High School	415

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Published in *The Sacramento Bee*, December 5, 1988

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Risk Factors for School Dropouts

Individual Factors

- immature, easily distracted behaviors
- gifted and/or talented abilities—bored with school
- verbal deficiency
- poor social adjustment/feelings of alienation
- frequent health problems
- alcohol/substance abuse
- lack of motivation, drive and future-orientation
- social or emotional disturbance
- low or inappropriate self-concept
- fear of failure
- inability to tolerate structure
- been abused emotionally, physically or sexually
- feelings of helplessness about home and school
- emotional dependency upon others/lack of security
- inability to ask for help
- pregnancy

Family Factors

- discrepancy between parental and school expectations and values
- frequent family relocation
- father/parent absence
- racial or ethnic minority
- family economic problems
- stressful home life
- parents and/or siblings with low educational level

Visible Signs

- grade retention
- poor grades
- frequent tardiness and absenteeism
- little or no extracurricular participation
- loner/social isolation
- inability to relate education to life experiences
- disruptive behavior / rebelliousness
- verbal abusiveness
- defensiveness/lack of trust in teachers and school administrators
- friends who are mostly older and out of school
- contacts with police
- poor communication between home and school
- need for immediate, concrete rewards
- talks about quitting school
- attempt at suicide

Initiating a Dropout Prevention Effort

Who should START a dropout prevention effort? Is it up to the school system in your county to begin? Is there a role for people in the community to play? If your county school system indicates that an effort already exists, is that enough?

A successful effort will involve both the school system and the larger community in a working relationship that allows interested people from both to combine their interest, resources and energy. Potential responses to an identified need such as dropout prevention are complex. Care must be taken to fully and honestly explore the opportunity for cooperation.

School System Climate

Whether you are a community group or individual, or are part of the school system, you need to gather some specific information concerning the current status of dropouts within the local school system.

What and how many resources are being directed to dropout prevention in your school system? Find out what prevention efforts are currently in place. Don't be shocked if there is not much. Again, look at it as a place to build. Resources might be identified: in personnel costs for staff working in dropout prevention, special classes or alternative programs for potential dropouts, volunteer efforts to assist students with academic difficulties, in-service training opportunities and staff time for developing a response to the problem.

What is the superintendent's level of concern? Don't assume that because a visible effort is not underway that nobody cares. Many circumstances can contribute to the lack of a strong prevention effort, and many relatively low-keyed efforts may be in place that can be built upon. Remember, many school systems have suffered from chronic underfunding that has limited creative efforts. Ask about the current status of dropout efforts in your community and ask the superintendent's perception of their effectiveness and comprehensiveness. This inquiry should tell you a lot about what the level of priority dropout prevention is currently, and about the opportunity to raise the issue to greater attention.

What is the dropout coordinator's role in your school system? Find out specifically who coordinates the dropout prevention effort, if there is one, and get to know that individual. What other responsibilities does this person assume? Who do they answer to? What is expected from them concerning dropout prevention? How open and receptive are they to community concern and involvement? How do they feel about their effectiveness? How do they perceive the dropout problem?

What relationship exists between innovators and decision-makers in the school system? Does there appear to be an acceptance of such individuals within the system? Are new ideas given real consideration? The school administrator who is most comfortable with the introduction of new ideas will probably be most responsive to a community involvement program.

What appears to be the attitude toward problem students? While recognizing that schools must provide an environment to allow learning to take place, how this is accomplished varies greatly among schools and systems. Before students drop out, problems are usually apparent. Does the system help students solve academic and personal problems rather than simply control problem behavior? Does the system communicate different expectations for students from different social and economic environments? Is the system able to communicate the dignity and worth of all individuals in the schools? While these are hard questions to assess, they appear to be central to the likelihood of school completion for many students.

Community Climate

How does the community communicate concerns to the schools? In one way or another, schools respond to needs felt and raised by the community. If there is little or no effort being addressed to dropout prevention, it may indicate that the larger community has not raised the issue very strongly. Focusing the concern of the community on dropouts can lead to the mobilization of efforts by the school system. As the school system recognizes that dropout prevention is a significant concern from the community, it will develop a response. The quality of the response will be better if the community interest is integrated in its development.

Start with the board of education members. They are elected to direct the local school system and will likely be very interested in the concerns of the public. Board members are generally well-known members of the community and are approachable by citizens. In-person or telephone conversations to individual members may result in more candid, or different, information than what would be offered either at a public board meeting or by the superintendent. Therefore, it may not be wise to make your first inquiry about their level of concern at a board meeting. Try to assess the board's awareness of the current situation relative to dropouts, knowledge of local efforts to make improvements, attitudes regarding their effectiveness, knowledge of levels of resources being directed toward prevention, and feelings toward greater community involvement in designing a prevention effort. You may want to spend some time identifying the best person to approach each board member to get the best and most information from the inquiry.

How can business be involved? The business community in a county can be very helpful in initiating a community effort within the school system. Today, many school systems seek out businesses to enter into partnerships with individual schools. Businesses that have made commitments to schools have already expressed an interest in providing assistance. Probably within any county there are business people who are interested in the dropout problem. Finding those interested and securing their commitment to help can provide your effort with potential avenues for resources, organizational skills, and legitimacy for your efforts. Businesses are continuously asked to donate to support varied school activities such as sports and bands. Some will be interested in being asked to give of their intelligence and influence for such a cause as dropout prevention.

How can community awareness be increased? Your values toward helping students succeed may not be as widely held as you may think. Many people may feel that "kids just don't try" and resent the cost associated with special efforts and second chances. Some may feel that nothing can be done, or that the effort takes resources away from advanced opportunities for more gifted or serious students. Others may still feel that they were successful without much education and that it isn't actually that important. The fact that school dropouts are closely associated with crime and delinquency may cause some to want to punish (or at least not help) those identified as potential dropouts, rather than see the effort as worthwhile. While most will not oppose a dropout prevention effort, recognizing the varied values held in the community may cause your group to develop different strategies for public education about dropout prevention.

Building a Community Coalition

Who is interested? The most important ingredient for any community action is the people involved. A core group of interested individuals is needed to cause any community change to occur. Interested people may come from a variety of situations. They may be active members of parent groups, from the business community, volunteers in various youth-oriented activities such as libraries, 4-H, scouts, or school extracurricular activities. They may be people with little involvement with youth directly, or people with occupations that bring them into contact with the resulting problems of dropouts, such as social workers, mental health workers and juvenile probation officers. They may also be teachers who recognize the need for more attention to the problem.

Everyone won't get involved, but some will. In developing a group of interested individuals for this purpose, be sure to clarify the intent. Some people may have their own agenda for being involved that may run counter to that of the group. Sometimes people want to criticize the people they think are in control rather than work cooperatively for making improvements. While public criticism is an individual's right and may even help bring attention and effort to a situation, it is not very often that those who start from that approach will get invited by those criticized to help design a solution to the problem. In short, very early in the formation of a group effort interested individuals need to look at potential strategies and their consequences.

Are local resources available? Assessing the opportunity for local resource support for a dropout prevention effort is an ongoing process. Note the general giving nature of a community early, and recognize that there will be a part for the larger community to play in the future. Are charities generally successful in your location? Is there an active adult literacy group? Does the community support special donations for the elderly and for needy children at holidays? Has the community a record of pulling together to respond to emergency needs? Does the community support libraries, fire departments and youth development activities? Are civic groups present, active and successful? These questions can give you insight into the likelihood of community response when you need their support.

How can individual perspectives be addressed? Two strong factors that motivate people to act are power and achievement. Which of these motivators is dominant in a group action characterizes its approach to problems. It will be important to recognize the motivations of people in your community regarding their interest in your efforts. Group actions are often perceived by past group experiences in the community. Skepticism and alienation toward a community effort may be a common reaction to be overcome. A successful community group will convince the community that achievement (to reduce the dropout rate) is their purpose, and that the effort is not about building a power base for any individual or segment of the population. This should be recognized by the community group and agreed to very early in the development of an action plan.

Are higher education resources available? A higher education institution within your county can serve as an important resource in developing a dropout prevention effort. The presence of college faculty and administrators within the community offers people who can help research and validate strategies, and can be important in developing proposals for grants and other sources of external funding if needed. If you have higher education in your county, involve these faculty and staff in your effort. If a higher education institution is not in your county, you may still be able to involve people from a neighboring college. It may take some time to find the right person so don't be discouraged if you do not connect on the first attempt. Be persistent.

How can parents be involved? Parents of students who do not succeed in school are often lumped with their children as not being interested or making the effort. While this may at times be true, often parents are frustrated by their children's problems in school and either lack the skills and resources to seek help, or are intimidated by the educational system. Often these parents did not experience much satisfaction with their own school years and assume that it will be that way for their children. This attitude can be reversed. Parents of students who are potential dropouts can provide important insight into their children's problems; and, when given the right setting to express their concerns, can be powerful, articulate advocates for actions to intervene before students leave school. They also serve as a

reality check for people who are concerned with the issue but have little first-hand contact with the problem. Just as any other segment of your community, all will not be interested in helping, but some will.

What about group differences? Within community groups, tensions and disagreements about procedures, goals and leadership often surface. Prepare for these. Create the most open involvement possible until a decision of action takes form. Share decision-making at every opportunity, and keep the goals in front of the group—goals that they recognize and support. Listen to everyone's ideas, and make sure that people understand how decisions will be made. Communicate as broadly and consistently as possible with all interested parties. Make everyone feel and know that their involvement is welcomed and appreciated.

Sometimes group conflict emerges despite your best efforts. Be aware of it at early stages, and consider intervention from outside the group to mediate before it gets unmanageable. If you find yourself in a group with conflict, try to reach agreement of common values and goals as a criteria for resolving the problem.

Once a group of interested people is identified to work on developing a dropout prevention effort, start a process that allows consideration of varied inputs of information. While the planning process is time consuming, the result of a well thought-out plan will be greater effectiveness and will reduce the likelihood of wasting community concern and resources on false starts. The other important advantage is that you will have a plan that is designed to impact the problem specifically in your community. Most importantly, people are more likely to support a plan they are involved in making, so the likelihood of being able to continue a community effort is strengthened by the development of a site-specific plan.

Identifying the problem is the first step in the planning process. While this seems simple and obvious, it is probably the most overlooked step. Very often people start with a solution.

"I think we should have an alternative school for potential dropouts" might be declared. While an alternative school is certainly one solution, it is not the only one. If the purpose of a group is to establish an alternative school rather than to reduce dropouts, the whole plan will be different. It is important that a group spend some time in defining the specific problem. Problems that persist are usually complex, and underlying problems exist that make them hard to solve. Spend the time necessary to know your current situation as completely as possible. This step is often annoying to action-oriented people; but it saves time in the long run.

Identify the alternatives. Someone once said that the worst possible idea is the single idea; because if it doesn't work, you have no alternatives. Considering your alternatives is very important. In another section of this publication, various strategies for dropout prevention will be discussed. While they should be included as alternatives, they should not be viewed as an exhaustive list. Be creative. Create an opportunity for the generation of ideas. Be accepting of all ideas suggested at first. There will be time later to evaluate and decide which to implement. It may be important to use a group strategy that assures that everyone has an opportunity to suggest alternatives. Again, someone who starts out strongly in favor of a specific idea may not want to consider other alternatives. This can be balanced by having the group individually generate ideas in writing first; then combining them into a larger total group list.

One consideration that will affect all alternatives is the scale of your effort. In other words, will you attempt a countywide program, a program in one school or one high school service area, etc.? Listen to everyone at this point if you expect their help in implementing the final plan later.

Anticipate consequences. Each alternative developed should be given serious consideration. The primary question to ask concerning each alternative is: will this solve or reduce the identified problem? A combination of professional opinions based on experience and research, and common sense by those who are involved in the planning process will provide the needed answer.

The second question to consider in anticipating consequences is: Can we do it? This question may be more difficult and take longer to answer. The answer may be tied to resources not already identified, school regulations, laws, other human resources, etc. Spend time sincerely thinking about which alternative or group of alternatives will have the most desired impact. Don't be quick to dismiss an alternative as beyond your ability or means. Call on creativity again to identify the resources, expertise and energies necessary to make it happen.

Planning action. After careful identification of the problem, an exhaustive look at alternatives, and an analysis of expected consequences, your group should be ready to make an action plan. This plan has two major parts. The first is the alternatives that you have chosen as the most likely to have the desired impact. The second part is a plan to develop the resources needed to implement this action. By now you should also have a clearer understanding of the time required to see the problem solved or improved. It may be important at this point to have a reality check with the group regarding their commitment to implementation. By now you will have realized that if it had an easy, simple solution, the problem probably would not have existed for so long, and that making an impact requires making a commitment.

Implementation simply means putting your plan into action. It sounds simple, but it is the real work of the effort. This will require developing the resources needed, getting acceptance from the school system (something made easier by their involvement from the beginning), development of work plans, personnel, and criteria for evaluation. Time to implement a plan can vary from a few weeks to several years, and its continuation to full implementation can depend on sustaining resources, perceived effectiveness, and many factors that make up program policy decisions.

Evaluation. The simplest way to view evaluation is: Did the action taken reduce or eliminate the problem identified? A good program evaluation should be planned early in the program design stage. If public funding is used for the program, evaluation will probably be required. Evaluating this kind of program effort may be very complicated. Don't ignore it. There are people who can provide information about evaluation design. It is not necessarily costly, but it may be. Build evaluation into your effort early and make sure it looks at the problem that your group has identified. The most credible evaluations are conducted by people not directly associated with the development of the other parts of the action plan. Colleges and universities have resources that might be appropriate for developing the evaluation.

While evaluation is the last stage of the planning process, it is not the end of the effort. Evaluation gives you insight into whether you are making progress toward your goal. It becomes an opportunity for redesign of efforts. It also can be an opportunity to celebrate your progress to date. Small improvements can add up to significant differences.

Strategies for Prevention and Intervention

Many different approaches can positively impact the dropout problem. No one particular approach will be appropriate in all situations.

The age of the students that you target will determine in part whether your approach is preventive or remedial. Potential dropouts can be identified as early as the third grade. Often when younger students are identified and targeted, preventive efforts can be very effective in helping students avoid later problems. By the time students have reached the middle grades and higher, the effort requires significant remediation for students to experience academic success. Remediation is generally more expensive than preventive programming. This section will look at some alternative approaches used in various communities that might be applicable locally. Deciding which alternative or combination will be best in any community will require interested people anticipating the consequences of each before making a decision about which to implement. The alternatives discussed are not the only ones. Innovative efforts are being developed all the time.

1. Tutoring/peer tutoring. Two of the most recognized characteristics of school dropouts are poor reading skills particularly, and poor academic performance. While most school systems have remedial programs, many students do not respond at a level that results in students catching up with their classmates.

Volunteer adults from the community and students who are having academic success can be very effective in helping underachieving students. Some tutoring programs are conducted at the school and some are located in the student's community. It is important that tutoring programs work as closely as possible with the classroom teacher. The school professionals will be able to help tutors be more effective.

2. Summer schools. Students who are identified as possible dropouts might be recruited to participate in summer school programs. Summer school is generally associated with making up a failed course; however, a special summer program to prevent students from falling farther behind prior to failing a class might be more attractive to students.

One thing is for sure. A summer program must be different enough from the normal school year program to attract students who are not doing well to attend and to succeed. Academic classes mixed with recreational time, field trips and experiential learning can be used to vary the routine. Rewards can be provided when goals are met.

Recruit the best possible teachers for a summer school program. Teachers must be willing to vary teaching methods, establish closer relationships with students than might be normal with a larger student enrollment, and reinforce students' successes. Other community volunteers can help in the program as aides or recreation leaders.

3. Extracurricular involvement. Studies show that over 60 percent of students who drop out of school were not involved in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular involvement can provide many meaningful opportunities to students. They represent connectedness, decision-making opportunities, and exposure to positive role models. They provide opportunities to excel in situations other than academics, and can often be a deciding factor for students to remain in school.

Schools and communities offer a variety of extracurricular activities for youth. For these activities to impact the dropout statistics, focus on an effort to include students most likely to drop out. These students are often difficult to involve. They may not have transportation to and from activities or money for club dues and other expenses. They may not identify with other participants in the activity. Or they may be part of a peer group who do not participate in extracurricular activities. Leaders of extracurricular activities will need to provide a level of support more generally considered parents' responsibilities to reach potential dropouts. and they may need to adapt activities to interest at-risk students.

4. Parent education. Many problems that affect the ability of students to succeed in school have there origins in the home. Some parents are not equipped, neither by skill nor resources, to meet the academic and school-related needs of their children. Parent education can make parents aware of their children's development, help them understand school expectations and make them aware of the pressures and doubts that are common to all parents. Research has shown that children from elementary to senior high benefit from parental involvement in their education.

An important section of a parent program can be helping children succeed in school. This topic might include preparing children for school, helping children with schoolwork, doing family activities that promote learning, helping children explore career choices and set future goals and communicating children's special needs to teachers. The benefits of parent involvement are not confined to the child's preschool years. Parents' attitudes, values and expectations play a predominant factor in determining a child's school achievement throughout a child's school career.

Communities may not directly envision parent education as a response to the dropout situation, but it represents an early intervention that has proven to prevent many future problems.

5. Alternative schools. The concept of alternative schools has varied interpretations. In some cases, the term means a class for truants. In other instances, alternative schools have created choices for students other than the usual school curriculum. These schools might distinguish themselves as having a different educational philosophy or management plan.

In some communities alternative schools have been developed within the public school to help students who have trouble adjusting to larger public schools. Students are identified by falling grades, absenteeism, etc., and placed with a teacher who works with identified students for the entire school day, taking assignments from the students' regular teachers, but spending more time helping with the students' academic and socio-emotional difficulties than may be available to them in a regular school classroom.

6. Counseling. Many problems that students experience in school stem from their behavior. School systems vary significantly in their responses to behavior problems, including counseling, detention, corporal punishment, suspension, expulsion and behavior grouping.

Most teachers and administrators recognize the value of counseling, and the need to provide counseling services in lower grades. The barrier usually cited to responding to this need is money. There are new opportunities for communities and schools to use federal funds to establish group counseling programs in schools. Community behavioral health services can assist communities in exploring these options.

7. Mentoring. Much like tutoring, mentoring is the idea of providing individual attention to students experiencing difficulties. This support can be either from adults or older students who are perceived by the students as successful. Mentoring involves developing supportive relationships based on mutual respect. This relationship will include more than an orientation toward academic achievement, including being someone for the student to talk with and confide in about many aspects of their lives. Mentoring may have its greatest impact when combined with other alternatives that have greater focus on improving academic skills.

8. Preschool programs. Preschool prevention efforts have proven to be effective in impacting many at-risk behaviors. Quality child care (from parents or caregivers) is essential to healthy development. School problems correlate with failure to develop secure, trusting relationships early in life, and inadequate language and coping skills at school entry.

Preschool group experiences and programs such as Head Start, produce students with higher academic achievement, lower dropout rates, reduced need for special education, fewer grade retentions, higher graduation rates, a positive attitude toward school and positive behaviors. Preschool programs do not have to be center-based to be effective. Providing parents with social supports and training on how to improve their children's learning skills can produce positive and lasting effects.

Summary

Spend some time thinking about these approaches and investigate others. Talk to people who have had experience with these methods. It is never too early or too late to intervene.

The U.S. Department of Education offers the following "best bet" strategies for keeping students in school and helping them to achieve while they are there.

1. Intervene early.
2. Create a positive school climate.
3. Set high expectations.
4. Select and develop strong teachers.
5. Offer programs that challenge students.
6. Schools, parents, organizations, churches and business must work together.

Developing Resources

We have all heard the adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." While the idea is a good one, the ratio is probably not very accurate. Preventive efforts for serious problems require costly investments and a committed effort to develop resources. Resources are available, but securing them requires hard work and time. Keep certain principles in mind.

First, a well developed plan is essential for developing resources. People who are in positions to provide funding—whether through businesses, foundations, or government financing—will be much more receptive to a request that reflects thought and planning.

Second, most funders are not interested in being the only funder. Some might provide challenge funding (funding you receive if you can match it from other sources), but almost all will want to see that others are interested in supporting the effort.

Third, funders will have different time schedules that will effect your program. Foundations usually have certain times when they review proposals for funding, and corporations and banks work significant giving into annual budgets. Timing for government grants varies, but is specific by program. Often the time from announcements of money for proposals and the awards is a short period. It is important to pay close attention to when funders are most receptive to hearing from your group.

Fourth, individual donations, while requiring more approaches to prepare and make than corporate or foundation grants, represent the large majority of resources. They are necessary for local efforts to be successful.

Basically, resources are financial, human, or other. All can be donated, and each can have significant value to a program effort. Many important resources are loaned, such as the use of a school multi-purpose room for a fundraising event, part-time clerical assistance from a supportive agency to help prepare the proposals to foundations, or a staff person from a business, college, or agency to help in the planning stage of the effort. Think about more than dollars when you are trying to assess what any particular individual or organization might be able to contribute.

School System Resources

Local school systems' financial conditions will vary greatly. Some may have discretionary funds that can be directed to a prevention effort, but many will not. The largest portions of school budgets are salaries with lesser amounts going to transportation, maintenance, and other operational costs. As school enrollment drops in counties, the number of positions funded also drops, and school administrators must manage down sizing of personnel. While this makes major financial commitments from many school systems to a new program effort seem unlikely, if the plan is developed along with the school system involvement, potential resources within their budget may be identified.

Often school systems are apprised of state funding for special projects. A dropout prevention effort may fit into a special funding situation and bring additional resources into the system. Schools are regularly asked to show the level of community involvement in many of these kinds of proposals, so having a community group organized along with the schools to address these problems will strengthen proposals.

Most of the people in the school system have job responsibilities other than dropout prevention. Their involvement in dropout prevention may be both a personal and an organizational contribution. The variety of resources that may come from the school system can be great so document those contributions. Many funders will require in-kind match (resources other than dollars to support the effort), and the time given in planning, the cost of making a facility available for a meeting or activity, school personnel time in implementing aspects of the effort (such

as identification of potential participants in a program effort or consultation and training of tutors), can all help in both getting a proposal funded and in support of the program effort.

Foundations and Corporations

Numerous foundations are interested in social efforts such as dropout prevention. Success with foundations is hard to predict. They must believe that your plan can work, they must be interested in your cause, your area of the country, and your target audience. Directories that list foundations interested in West Virginia usually are available through public libraries. Listings tell the range of gifts given recently, a contact name and address, and any specific interest. To attract foundation resources, someone must be ready to invest some time in researching possible donors.

After several foundations are targeted, some thought must go into how to best approach a foundation for funding. Call the contact person of the foundation to see how and when they prefer requests to be made. Many will have specific proposal outlines that stress aspects they value highly. These may include sections on evaluation, developing in-kind contributions, networking with other community groups, the structure of your organization that will receive the funding, how the need was identified with supporting data and how the effort will continue after the foundation funding is exhausted.

Do not get discouraged if the first effort to attract foundation funding is not successful. If the concern is powerful enough to attract a broad local interest, there will probably be a foundation that will also be interested in the problem. A significant side benefit from developing foundation proposals for a community effort is that they often force your group to do some realistic thinking about the hard parts of community activity, particularly evaluation and how the effort can be sustained.

Corporations are often approached much like foundations. Big corporations today have employees who manage corporate giving, and they tend to ask the same kinds of questions as foundations. One advantage with corporations is that if they are located within your region, they are stakeholders in the quality of life for their communities, and the level of productivity of their employees. Think seriously about what you want a corporation to contribute. Corporations are accustomed to thinking in larger dollar amounts than most of us can imagine, and they are relatively comfortable with the idea that major problem solving is expensive. This does not mean that they are interested in seeing their resources wasted, or being the only contributor. It is important to convey a realistic financial picture for the proposed effort.

Other Local Resources

Banks, smaller businesses, civic groups, nonprofit corporations, and individuals all represent the potential wealth of resources that can be attracted and focused on improving a local situation. Each can be sources of financial, human, or other resources. For example, not only could a bank make a financial contribution to an effort, but in-kind auditing services for funds contributed by individuals and foundations could be donated that would show good fiscal control for the project.

A local civic club could be involved in fund-raising, mentoring, tutoring, serving on a planning group, writing letters of support for government or foundation funding, and more. Creative minds will find many ways for groups and individuals to contribute. While local giving may not completely finance an effort, being able to point to broad support for a project is very effective in attracting other resources to the project.

Advocacy

Programs don't just happen. A person or a group of persons recognize a deficiency or need and decide to do something about it. If it's in a school setting, it may be the superintendent, principal, or supervisor who identifies a need and initiates action to resolve the need. If it is within the community, any leader or person can identify the need and resolve to initiate change. The point is that any change in an existing system begins with an advocate. *Webster defines* advocate *as one that pleads the cause of another; or one that defends or maintains a cause or proposal.*

An advocate's role can include:

1. Serving as a spokesperson for potential dropout students' needs and issues within the school and community.
2. Assisting in identification of potential dropouts and the development of programs to serve "at risk" students.
3. Remaining knowledgeable of community resources to meet the needs of potential dropouts and serving as liaison among parents, students, schools, and community resources.
4. Serving as contact person for dissemination of information from the school, central office, community agencies, and others regarding "at risk" student issues and needs.
5. Providing leadership in modeling concern, in educating faculty, students and the community regarding "at risk" issues and programs.
6. Initiating policy and procedural changes.
7. Coordinating efforts within a community school area regarding programs and activities to address "at risk" issues.
8. Continuing to gain knowledge and skills through professional growth regarding all factors of "at risk" issues.

Advocates should be expected to initiate a response to dropouts. They must take responsibility for the necessary leadership to get the job done. An advocate cannot assume that other professionals and community leaders want to pay the price required to decrease dropouts in their school or district. A plan with documentation of the problem and responses to the problem is necessary.

Part of a plan should include networking. Networking means the forming of alliances within an existing system, both within the school and the community. The focus of the alliances is upon the recognition that dropping out is a problem and that selected individuals are willing to work together to confront the problem. The alliance must seek power.

Just being named to a committee does not assure a power base. A power base must be developed. One paramount concern for any new program is what happens when the alliance folds or members of the alliance lose their commitment over time. History shows that if the innovation has not been assimilated within the structure of the system, the innovation will quickly pass. If a committee is designated the responsibility for developing a dropout prevention program, and the committee lacks access to resources, or the committee does not include status personnel, chances for success decrease.

Nurture the network. To maintain a viable network requires continued communication and personal interaction. Schedule meetings, seek input and provide feedback, but remain in control. As an advocate you must:

1. Accept responsibility to be an advocate.
2. Acquire the knowledge and skill necessary to be an advocate.
3. Develop a network through the formation of alliances.
4. Be the leader.

Creating Successful Efforts

Cooperation is essential for sustained and effective efforts. The educational level of West Virginians affects everyone in our communities. In creating a response to the school dropout crisis, every step of the process will be largely impacted by the effectiveness of attracting and keeping the community involved. Sharing decision-making, delegating significant assignments, and recognizing others' efforts are keys to success.

Throughout this guide, many groups have been mentioned that could play a part. Don't overlook any. Be as inclusive as possible. Think creatively about the many ways they may contribute. If people or groups do not come forward at first, don't be discouraged. Leave the door open for their involvement as the effort continues.

Be positive. Select a dropout prevention strategy and give it a try. Don't be discouraged if first efforts fall short of expectations. Sometimes new initiatives take time to work. Pinpoint any weak areas and try again or select another approach.

> The most effective dropout prevention includes a comprehensive, long term approach with clear messages to children that adults care about their school success.

Everyone Can Help Children Stay in School

Businesses Can:

- pair an employee with a student to mentor
- initiate a school/business partnership
- sponsor extracurricular activities
- require employees to have a high school diploma
- hire students for no more than 18 hours per week

Parents Can:

- take pride in children's efforts to learn
- maintain high expectations
- emphasize reading as an important activity
- limit television viewing
- provide homework assistance
- become involved with the school
- communicate with teachers and principals
- provide opportunity for informal learning

Teachers Can:

- recognize differences in learning styles
- reward effort as well as achievement
- enlist the cooperation of parents
- set high expectations
- foster students' self-esteem
- become familiar with school dropout risk factors

The Community Can:

- value education
- recognize student achievement
- support schools through volunteerism, equipment donations, financial assistance, and special recognition of school personnel
- provide means for public awareness of school issues
- promote school pride through school beautification projects and other special projects

Appendices

These appendices may be used for duplication or overhead transparencies.

The Top Seven Major Problems Confronting Our Schools

Top Problems in 1940	Top Problems Today
1. Talking	1. Drug Abuse
2. Chewing Gum	2. Alcohol Abuse
3. Making Noise	3. Pregnancy
4. Running in the Halls	4. Suicide
5. Getting Out of Line	5. Rape
6. Wearing Improper Clothing	6. Robbery
7. Not Putting Paper in Wastebasket	7. Assault

Source: The Fullerton, CA. Police Department and the California Department of Education

About West Virginia's Children

Teen Birth Rate: In 1989, 17.8% of births were to teen mothers. 66% of teen mothers in West Virginia had not completed high school.

One-parent Families: Nearly 1/4 of all West Virginia births in 1989 were to unwed mothers.

Health Care: 1 in 3 children does not see a doctor or dentist because of inability to pay or lack of insurance.

Birth Weight: In 1989, W.Va. white teens had the nation's highest percentage (18.7%) of low-birth-weight babies. Low birth-weight babies have a greater risk of later learning disabilities.

Developmental Delays and Disabilities: An estimated 30,000 preschoolers are at risk of developmental delay. Only 850 of an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 developmentally delayed or handicapped infants or toddlers are being served by early intervention programs.

Poor School Preparedness: Head Start programs serve only 4,000 children per year, 20% of the 20,000 eligible children in need of services.

Child Abuse and Neglect: In 1989, there were 14,000 child abuse and neglect referrals. Presently, there are 132 protective service workers—at least 267 workers are needed.

Substance Abuse: In 1988, only 12% of West Virginia's 17,500 youths in need of substance abuse treatment received it. Large numbers of youth do not receive treatment for substance abuse because most West Virginia health insurance policies do not pay for it.

Public Assistance: Public assistance payments to the 66,000 W.Va. children on welfare is equal to only 30% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Child Care: Care for children under 2, for school-aged children and for sick children is hard to find or nonexistent. Twelve West Virginia counties have no licensed child care centers. The state training program for child caregivers has been eliminated because of lack of funding. There is no state licensing for family day care homes.

Sources: The Children's Agenda, An Investment in West Virginia's Future: Recommendations for the Honorable Gaston Caperton, "Report of the Children's Agenda Committee," Taunja Willis Miller, Secretary, West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. March 1, 1990.

"Children in Crisis: State at Risk." Progress report of the West Virginia Human Resources Association, 1990.

"West Virginia Vital Statistics." Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau of Public Health, Health Statistics Center, 1989.

Sample Questions to Assess the Dropout Situation

About Schools:

Do county schools have a system of identifying students at-risk?

- How early are these students identified?

What happens to the students after they are identified?

- What services do schools offer at-risk students?
- When are children referred to services?

What happens to returning dropouts?

- Is there an alternative curriculum for returning dropouts?

What other services or programs outside of the school are available for at-risk students?

- Are all staff informed of these referral sources?

What school staff and resources are available for at-risk student services?

Does the school offer staff training for work with at-risk students and their families?

How do teachers accommodate cultural diversity and differences in learning styles of students?

Is the curriculum developmentally appropriate at each grade level?

Is each school a pleasant, comfortable place for students with adequate resources and equipment?

How are parents involved in the schools?

About Families & Communities:

Are county children well prepared physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually for school?

What services are available to help parents prepare their preschool children for school?

What opportunities are there for parents to be involved with schools?

What services/activities are available to parents to help them be more supportive to their children's schooling?

What extracurricular activities are available to youth in the community?

- How many youth are served?
- Do at-risk children participate?

What career awareness activities are available?

- How many youth participate?

How are local businesses involved with the schools?

Are there visible signs that the community cares about its schools?

- How is the importance of education communicated to children?

Resources for Information on Dropout Prevention

Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215
617-353-3309

National Congress of Parents and Teachers (National PTA)
700 N. Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611
312-787-0977

National Association for the Education of Young Children
1834 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20009
800-424-2460

National Committee for Citizens in Education
108040 Little Patuxent Parkway #301
Columbia, MD 21044-2396
800-638-9675 Helpline

Publications include: A Book of Sources; Dropout Prevention, the Evidence Continues to Grow; Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement, an annotated bibliography by Anne Henderson

Appalachian Educational Laboratory
P. O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
800-344-6646 (in West Virginia)

Publications include: The Link, free to educators in the AEL region, Catalog of Programs, Research Reports, and Technical Assistance Ideas for Educators in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia by Betty Harris James and Carolyn Luzader (1989), Handbook for Writing School Newsletters, Craig B. Howley (1987), Improving School-Home Communications: A Resources Notebook for Staff Developers, Oralie McAfee (1984).

National Dropout Prevention Center and National Dropout Prevention Network
Clemson University
Clemson, SC 29634-5111

Publications include: National Dropout Prevention Newsletter, a quarterly publication.

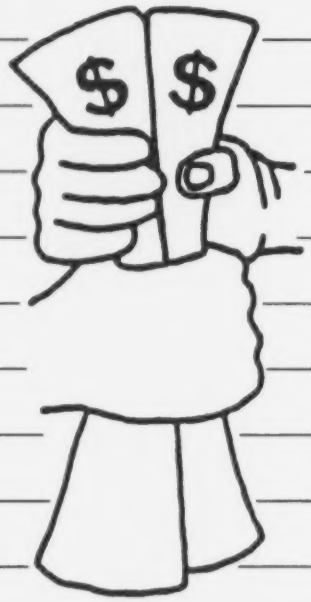
National Diffusion Network
Contact: Cornelia Calvert Toon, State Facilitator
State Department of Education
Bureau of Finance and Services
Building #6, Room 252
Charleston, WV 25305

Publications include: Educational Programs That Work, a collection of proven exemplary educational programs and practices (updated annually.)

West Virginia Human Resources Association
P. O. Box 5265
Charleston, WV 25361-0265
800-633-0120
Publications include: Children in Crisis: A State At Risk

SCHOOL PAYS

Degree	Average Monthly Earnings
Professional	$ 3,439
Doctorate	2,747
Master's	1,956
Bachelor's	1,540
Associate	1,188
Vocational	990
High School	848
No High School	415



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Published in *The Sacramento Bee*, December 5, 1988

The Value of a High School Diploma

The chart above shows the average national monthly earnings of a person at different levels of education. The key to the higher levels of education is a high school diploma. The key to earning a high school diploma is an investment of applied time during four years.

180 school days per year x 4 yrs = 720 days spent in school

720 days x 6 hrs per day = 4,320 hours time spent in school

Assume a person with just a high school education would work from age 18 through age 65, a total of 47 years.

High School Graduate / $848 x 12 mos = $10,176 yr x 47 yrs = $478,272

Non-High School Grad. / $415 x 12 mos = $ 4,980 yr x 47 yrs = $234,060

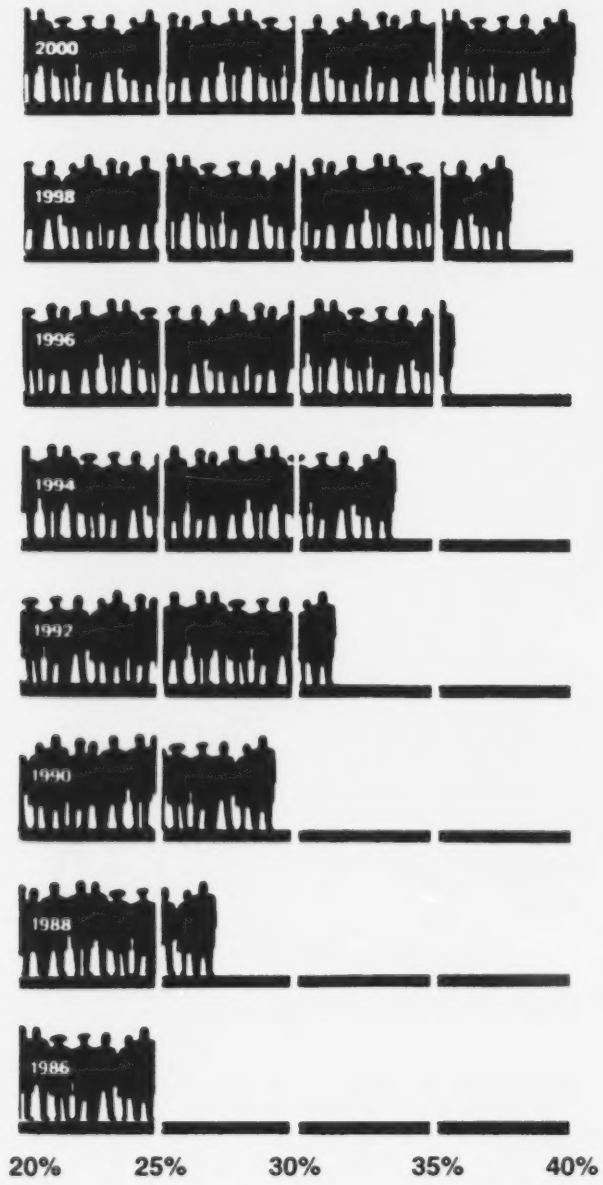
H.S. Graduate *income higher by* $ 5,196 yr x 47 yrs = $244,212

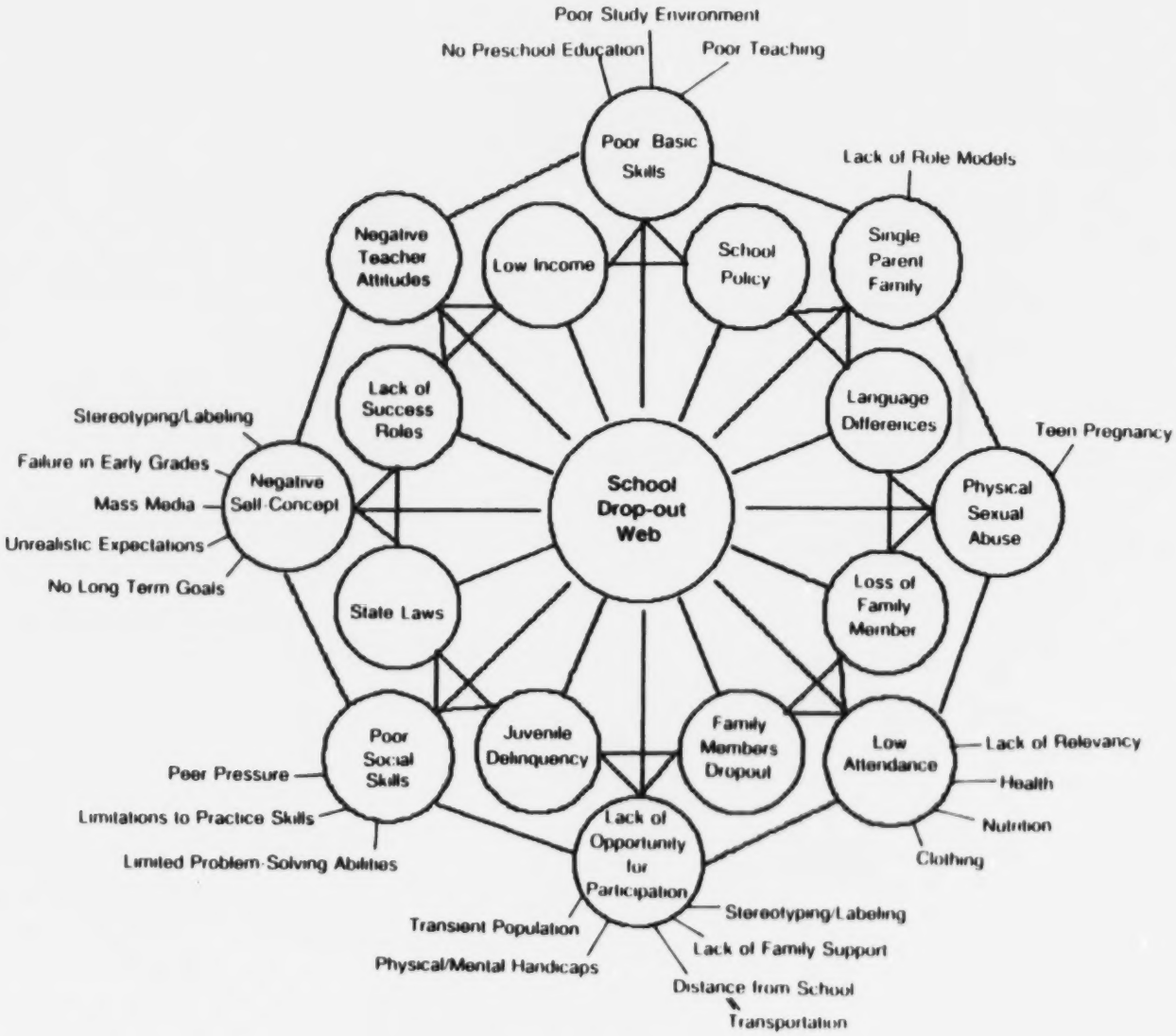
The relative value of the high school diploma, per hour of time spent to earn it, is: $244,212 ÷ 4,320 hrs = $56.53 hr

The value/worth of a high school diploma increases even more when you consider its added worth to *retirement income*, which is usually relevant to the earnings before retirement — and would average *twice* the amount a non-high school graduate would earn.

National Projected Dropout Rate by Year 2000

If the current rate persists, the proportion of children "at risk" for school failure will grow each year.





Source: Barbara Dougherty & Jan Palm,
Vocational Studies Center,
University of Wisconsin-Madison,
1025 W. Johnson Street
Madison, WI 53706

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Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1989). "Dealing with the Dropouts: The Urban Superintendent's Call to Action." Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education.

Schoumacher,S. & Cadden, V. (1989). Preparing Your Child for the 21st Century. McCall's. 41-49.

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In Class, In Step:
A Community Conference

Working together to keep children in school

March 14-16, 1991
Days Inn • Flatwoods

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sponsored by the
West Virginia
School Dropout Prevention
Task Force

CG023284

In Class, In Step: A Community Conference

You are invited!

- business, church, and community leaders interested in the school dropout problem
- school administrators
- board of education members
- teachers and guidance counselors
- social workers and therapists
- extension agents and 4-H and youth leaders

Get practical solutions to the dropout problem.

Network and communicate.

Be part of a community team to plan effective prevention strategies.

FEATURES

Thursday, March 14, 1:00-7:00 p.m.

Why Care About Children At Risk?
Keynote address by Hillary Rodham Clinton, Chair of the Children's Defense Fund Board and First Lady of Arkansas.

- Panel discussion by invited state leaders on the school dropout problem from a West Virginia perspective.
- Overview of the school dropout problem.
- Dinner speaker, George Dougherty, Earl of Elkview.

Friday, March 15, 8:30 a.m.

Concurrent sessions:
Workshops and presentations sharing West Virginia programs for at-risk youth.

- *Creating a Networking Strategy,* Sam Bonasso and Margie Hale, W.Va. Task Force on Children, Youth and Families.
- Networking Dinner.

Saturday, March 16, 8:30-11:15 a.m.

- *Practical Tips on Team Planning,* Bob Moore, WVU Extension Service, and Miriam Leatherman, Hardy County Family Issues Task Force.
- *Where Do We Go from Here?* Therese Wilson and Ben Dickens, W.Va. Department of Education.

REGISTRATION and FEES

$75.00 Early registration fee includes: conference materials, refreshment breaks, and meals. (Must be postmarked by February 22, 1991.)

$90.00 Late registration.

$45.00 One-day registration.

Cancellations on or before Feb 22, 1991, subject to a $5.00 service charge.

Cancellations after February 22, 1991 will receive a 50 percent refund.

Lodging Reservations

The conference will be held at the new Days Inn in Flatwoods.

Room reservations are the responsibility of the individual conference participants. A block of rooms has been held at the Days Inn at a reduced rate of $39.95 (for a double room) plus tax. Room rates will be guaranteed until Feb. 22.

To reserve a room, please call the Days Inn directly (304-765-5055) and identify yourself as attending the School Dropout Prevention Conference.

For more information, please contact Sylvia Miller (304) 293-4013.

REGISTRATION FORM — In Class, In Step: A Community Conference

( ) Please reserve a place for me for three days, March 14-16, 1991. ($75 on or before Feb. 22; $90 after February 22)

( ) Please reserve a place for me at the conference for one day only. ($45 for one day; indicate which day below)

I will attend: ☐ All three days OR ☐ Thur., March 14 ☐ Fri., March 15 ☐ Sat., March 16

Name _____ Telephone _____

Position/Organization _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

County _____ Are you participating as a member of a county team? ☐ yes, ☐ no

Professional improvement credits are available. Please check if interested:

☐ Non-credit CEUs ☐ AHEA PDUs ☐ Social Work licensure ☐ Counseling licensure

Make Checks payable to: **WVU Foundation, Inc.**

Mail to: Sylvia Miller, 705 Knapp Hall, P.O. Box 6031, Morgantown, WV 26506-6031

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